

GET SOME / "Oscar Mike"

By [Jacob Clifton](#) | Season 1 | Episode 1 | Aired on 07.13.2008

First Recon, Bravo Company gets ready for their mission: a Humvee road trip up into Afghanistan. Normally at this point you'd get to know the people, but there's a problem with Marines in how they all look the same, so instead you get to know what they look like in their underwear.

These guys are like... You know how male cheerleaders are so interested in not being gay that it's like they went through gay and came out the other side? They don't think about the elephant so hard that it's like they are creating the elephant with their buck-naked mind powers. While running around totally bored in their underwear, the Marines: talk about how gay everything is, blow up an espresso machine, worry intensely about J. Lo, and fight unendingly about what hats to wear and whether their mustache hairs are regulation. Needless to say, this comes with a lot of talk about how they're not gay in any way, some justified bitching about their retarded superiors, and yet more running around in their underwear.

The men finally stop acting like heathens (relatively) upon the arrival of Evan Wright, the Rolling Stone reporter who will write the article that spawns the book that becomes a seven-hour long movie that we're watching. Because they're all aware that they are in the gayest movie of all time, they congratulate each other overmuch on how excited they are to be in the presence of a former Hustler writer. Evan seems to be absolutely thrilled by every ridiculous fact of Marine life, but to be fair, so are they. It's like watching a class of ten-year-old boys on a field trip to the fire station, only they actually get to drive the truck and use the hose.

Still not going anywhere, the Marines make fun of Evan for awhile, get him to start chewing tobacco, talk about the astounding hotness of Rudy Reyes and how it has not quite turned them gay yet, run around in their underwear some more, make some gay softcore, and get caught in a horrible dust storm. Some Cool Hand Luke reject runs around screaming about "moostash hairs" a whole lot and making everybody tuck in their shirts, which is totally awesome and would get him fragged if this were a movie about fake fictional folks. Later, everybody's totally overjoyed to be in a gas attack, which turns out to be fake, so yet again nothing has happened. Evan runs around like a total idiot and swallows his tobacco, but they decide that he is okay, mostly because it means something actually happened.

Evan will be riding around with Team Leader Iceman, the totally insane driver Ray Person, and the unbearably smug but likeable Lance Cpl. Trombley. Ray Person basically snorts Ripped Fuel all day and all night and tells Evan his constantly evolving and bizarre theories about the war, Saddam, life and everything. It's probably the most interesting stuff, because you can still like Person at this point. A quick break from the constant gay talk means some hilarious racism, then Iceman's team rips on a little girl's letter from America so hard and disgustingly that it will blow your hair back. He spends a lot of time being disapproving of the bizarre weirdos on his team, and also adoring them. The only other person you need to remember right now is Lt. Fick, who is totally fantastic.

Bored as hell, the boys are excited by a pizza party, but there's more to it than just pizza: they're moving out. Everybody puts on their clothes finally, and hates on the commanding officers for awhile, and stock up on adult diapers. That's a subplot I am not interested in watching be developed. A few tiny run-ins later, all basically 100% faithful to the book plus even more obnoxious grandstanding by Trombley, the episode ends just where it should: a bunch of Iraqi surrenders, not being mission-critical, are set on the road back home and into the fire of Fedayeen death squads. While the Geneva Convention says you take care of surrenders and give them safe passage, the higher-ups have a simple solution: un-surrender them and keep moving. Evan and Lt. Fick, the officer in charge, are totally grossed out, but Fick pulls what will become a characteristic move: telling Evan to write whatever the hell he wants.

Five vehicles converging into a single line in the dust, mirage lines as they come together. V formation collapsing into enfilade, coming through the dust straight at you, endless radio chatter full of misfits and hitmen. First Recon Battalion is commanded by Godfather, who talks like Brando; his Sergeant Major is Sixta, who talks like *Deliverance*. There are three companies: Alpha (callsign "Assassin"), commanded by Captain Patterson, Bravo ("Hitman"), commanded by Encino Man (his Gunnery Sergeant is Casey Kasem), and Charlie ("Raptor"). Eventually there will be Delta, but they don't count and fuck them anyway.

In Bravo Company are three platoons. Third platoon is commanded by Captain America, regrettably. You will know him by the shrieking of his constantly degrading paranoia (and from *Malcolm In The Middle*, where he played Francis's best friend Eric, whom I loved). Second platoon is mostly what we're dealing with, commanded by Lt. Nate Fick (the guy that looks like Opie, with Gunny Wynn, the guy that looks like Ron Perlman). In second platoon there are three teams. Team One is led by Brad "Iceman" Colbert, so when they say "Hitman Two One," they mean Brad: Bravo Company, Second Platoon, Team One. It's easy: Battalion (First Recon), company (Bravo), platoon (2), team (1).

The unbelievably irritating Cpl. Ray Person drives the Humvee for Iceman's team. It's Ray and Brad in the front, insane Trombley (the youngest and deadliest shooter in Bravo Company, and the one most likely to compare shooting somebody in the stomach to *Grand Theft Auto*) in back, and Gabriel Garza up top, manning the gun turret. They don't talk about it, because if you thought about it for five seconds you would freak out like Captain America, but what this means is that the entire platoon balances on Ray, because he's the driver of the lead vehicle. Tactically and practically speaking: If Ray dies, everybody dies. Sometimes it's hard to understand how they manage to love his unholy ass but I think that might be part of it.

Garza spots something in the distance, and soon enough the battle's joined. There are several trucks firing on each other, and then a plane flies overhead, dropping missiles in the middle of everything. And all the time, the radio chatter turning bombs into declarative statements like "cleared hot" and "missile away," and turning deaths into permission, and turning people into numbers and locations and callsigns. The camera flashes on things: a belt loop, a pisiform wrist bone, a coiled telephone cord, a name tag. It's the kingdom of Things. *Four T-55s at one o'clock, two klicks. Hitman, this is Hitman Two One. Enemy contact, four T-55s, One o'clock, two klicks, how copy? Contact right! Enemy foot-mobiles, four o'clock, 300 m, by the berm. This is Hitman Two One. Roger that.* Garza swings his machine gun high, aiming at a plane. *Misfit Two Two, cleared hot. Missile away. Contact right. RPG team, two o'clock... 500 meters behind the truck.* They blow a truck to bits, and then explode the bits.

Trombley's pissed because he didn't get to fire a round; Misfit pushes around to look for more targets. Ray's congratulating them on having "barbecued them hajjis" when there are explosions everywhere; the truck goes wild. The chatter says there's a man down, Echo Four Lima -- meaning a Corporal, or pay grade E-4, with last name beginning "L," meaning Jason Lilley -- has been hit. The chatter turns men into things. Hitman orders Ray out of the kill zone, and orders the other trucks to get out the way and make a hole. Brad and Ray head straight for Lilley and all the Humvees do the Tokyo drift in the sand. They shout for the Corpsman and he comes running, but Espera tells him not to waste any morphine. "My boy's been smoked." Doc Bryan asks if anybody else got hit. Garza stares down.

"How's it feel, motherfucker? How's it feel to be fucking dead?" Everybody stares. Lilley's body speaks. His voice is surfer-soft. "Bro, it feels sad. I feel very alone."

"... And also, I gotta take a shit." The company cracks up and Espera bitches that he had dibs on Lilley's video camera, somebody else called dibs on his wife. Lt. Nate Fick congratulates Lilley on his skill at being dead. How's it feel to be dead? It was just a game, though. Just practice. Lucky them. They spend all day and night looking for death, trying to get a look in his eyes, and when they can't find him, they rehearse. It feels sad, and very alone. Fick pulls the leaders out for debrief on the exercise. "This was the first time the boys got to live-fire any mark-19s or .50s," Espera notes, and Nate worries at the fact that it probably will end up being their only chance, before the invasion. Iceman brings up, not for the first or last time, that they need batteries for their scopes and goggles, and Nate says deadpan: "Our ops chief assures me they're coming. I'm assured of this." Assured by Encino Man's Sergeant, the unctuous and useless Casey Kasem, who so far hasn't done anything remotely helpful.

"I've never seen a fifty cal fuck up a truck before," Garza says. "That was cool. I wonder what it would look like if you hit a person." Everything he says is so thoughtful and dreamy that it sometimes takes a while for the words to hit you. What they mean. Trombley strokes his weapon, still sulking. "At least you got to fire yours. She didn't even shoot off round one." Ray tells him to quit talking to his gun "like it's trim," or else his secret psycho-ness will no longer be a secret. Too late. You can see it in his eyes. I think he's one of the better actors in the bunch, honestly, because you can tell this is a kid who has no idea. When Evan talks about "Generation Kill," he's talking about this kid right here.

[PAGE 3-4 MISSING]

Adolph gives Ray the sad and misguided news about J. Lo, and while Ray's trying to share this very upsetting news with Iceman, Fick calls him over. "Bravo Two! All of you, listen up. H&S company had a negligent discharge today... So the CO personally wants to make sure we brass-check our weapons." Nobody was hurt, miraculously. "That would suck, homes," cracks Ray, "Getting killed before you got to go to war and kill people." Somebody tells Ray to shut up, because somebody always tells Ray to shut up, because the motherfucker needs to shut up, and Nate asks them also to

finish up the chess tourney before lights out, because Sergeant Major Sixta has decided that chess is a problem. Or I mean, however you say that in retard.

Ray: "Lieutenant, have you gotten any word on...?" Nate practically clicks his heels, snapping out his answer. "I only get what's passed down to me from Godfather, and the only word he gets is from the BBC. If we're lucky, Saddam will back down, let the inspectors in and we can go home. The important thing is, we are doing our jobs by being here. All of you should be proud." Ray shakes his head. I honestly can't tell if he's kidding about this, and I don't think Nate does either. "Sir, that's not the word I was asking about. We wanted to know if you knew anything about J. Lo being killed." The platoon starts fighting about whether she's Puerto Rican or Mexican, because if she's the former then she can't be somebody's cousin in the platoon, except what is a Puerto Rican anyway, blah blah. "Ray," Nate says after taking a moment to make sure he doesn't burst into hysterical laughter in front of his men: "The Battalion Commander offered no sitrep as to J. Lo's status." He leaves quickly thereafter, and Ray is glum.

Sergeant Major Sixta is talking that fucked-up Dan Rather "two rabbits fucking in a wool sock" talk outside, while Rudy makes espresso inside the tent. Trombley stares at him, hard. "Since when did the Marine corps start letting in faggots?" It doesn't make you gay if you think Rudy's hot, Trombley.

I'm pretty sure it makes you gay if you think Lilley's hot, though, because he looks exactly like gay porn, which makes this whole scene even funnier. Espera starts messing with Lilley about his video camera again, wondering how he's meant to make his brilliant war movie if he's driving Espera's Humvee all day. "You think CNN's gonna want to buy your version of the war?" Jason thinks it's possible. Espera points him toward Rudy, who is as usual doing whatever is most totally ridiculous. Rudy's whole life is like everything is going fine, and then somehow his pants get caught on a nail or something, or maybe just spontaneously they rip right down the middle and a bird swoops down from the sky and steals his shirt so he's naked, just as he's accidentally spilling motor oil all over himself. Half the scenes of this episode he's in the background like that: "Oh, I forgot to put on pants under these chaps. Better do some martial arts."

Espera leads Lilley's eye from the bottom to the top, up the landscape of Rudy. Lilley is silent beyond the occasional "Brah" as he trains the camera up. "You know, you'd be better off shooting Rudy. Now that is some shit you could sell right there. Gay porn! Gay porn, Lilley! Yo, all you gotta do is get Rudy on board, and you gonna be the next Spielberg of twink movies..." The difference between actual gay porn and what we're watching now is debatable for a second. Rudy puts on his gear, piece by piece, and loads up all his pockets with tools and rocks and junk, then heads out. The chess game continues.

Out in Camp Mathilda, they're yelling at him. He runs, and runs, and runs, grunting and groaning under the weight. He's so averse to clothing in general I can't imagine

what all this excess is like for him. "Fuck yeah! Get some! Let's go! Slay that dragon! Get some!" Ray screams from the tents, "I love you, Fruity Rudy!"

At the command meeting, the high is expected to be 85 Fahrenheit, nightly lows in the upper 30s, shamal winds moving in, gusting up to 70 mph. Nate worries, correctly, that the weather's attrition on them will be worse than the enemy. If they ever see the enemy; Gunny Wynn hums in agreement. At the head of the sitting crew stands Godfather, explaining the mission. Godfather is ambiguous. He's likeable, and very beautiful, and a lot of what he says is good and makes sense, but maybe that's the actor doing that. Because the other side of Godfather -- commander of the entire Battalion -- is yucky and doctrinaire and micromanaging, in that Sixta/Captain America/Encino Man way. The grooming standard, more stringent than the regular requirements, is his personal baby; he refers to himself in the third person.

"Word from the CG is to maintain our readiness and ongoing preparations to enhance our readiness here in Kuwait. What does Godfather think? I think, in other words: no word. Our objective remains getting into that A-O, securing that bridge over the Euphrates, and holding it for the main Marine Force. Rolling through Iraq in open-top Humvees is completely outside of what First Recon does. We might not like it, but the General has asked this Battalion to be America's shock troops. And Godfather can't tell the General we don't do windows." The men laugh. Patterson, Alpha Company's command, asks again for maps of the A-O, the Area of Operations. Godfather acknowledges the issue as Battalion-wide, and promises it's being worked on. Encino Man asks, quite seriously and stupidly, about "the policy on the wearing of the beanies": "When should they be worn?" Godfather underlines that the grooming standard is mission critical: "Just because these men fancy themselves an elite unit doesn't mean they own the rules." Captain America nods, because worrying about beanies is easy and he likes it easy. "Between 0900 and 1700 watch caps are a no-go." Sixta repeats the order in his ridiculous accent: "I don't wants to see no cowboy elvises walkin around in them beanies!" God, just the sound of his voice makes me want to shoot guns.

Out in the camp Espera's team is doing their best to work on their vehicle. All the Humvees have rotted hoses, which like everything else vaguely phallus-shaped are referred to as "donkey dicks." "I just got this bucket five days ago," Espera complains. "This is like *Gilligan's Island*, they're giving us rocks and coconuts to make radios." The mechanic, Jeff, is pissed. "Even the gaskets are gone, man. Back home, they're driving around in Mercedes Benz SUVs, picking up their poodles at the dog cappuccino stand. And here we are invading a country with ghetto hoopties. It's depressing!" Ray appears out of nowhere, shoving a donkey dick between Jeff's legs. "Had to suck an officer's cock to get these," he snorts, and Jeff goes off again. They're a good pair. "See? That's some exploitive shit. You been exploited by your betters. You know what we need in America, man? Is a holiday where once a year the blue-collar man gets to go into the home of the white-collar man, eat his food, sleep in his bed and fuck his shit up."

Ray accuses Jeff of communism; he reacts poorly. They talk a lot about communism, in the Battalion. It didn't make a whole lot of sense at first, but I think I get it. As a cultural gloss, the bugbear of Communism as an all-purpose signifier for weakness and a particularly anti-capitalist, which is to say anti-American, point of view encapsulates everything the rest of the country -- the liberal media, et. al. -- doesn't understand anymore. I mean, war is bad. But that's not a Marine thought. So all the non-Marine thoughts in the world, thanks to the '60s, can be easily filed under communism. It's an artifact. It reminds me most -- stay with me here -- of the way men pass down information in other environments, like, the '70s and poppers and drag queens were a long time ago, and made sense in that time and place. But you meet a 20-year-old gay kid who still thinks those things are relevant, it's because somebody got ahold of him before he invented the world for himself. So the whole communism thing -- most of the guys in Bravo Company, understand, are under twenty-five -- is extant in the men who've trained them, and the men who trained those men. And it means something larger than it pretends to. The entire concept of getting offended if you called somebody a communist, it's so weird. But in this context it makes total sense that it's still pejorative.

Espera spies a Blue Force tracker screen in Iceman's Humvee: Blue Force Tracker is a new mapping system, still buggy and kludgy, that identifies elements within the A-O and locates them every thirty seconds. Blue for friendly, red for the enemy. If they were everywhere, the 2.0 war could really begin, but instead Iceman's got one of just a few in the whole Battalion. "Downtown Baghdad, Safwan Hill... The entire A-O..." Espera's impressed: "You *are* the Iceman, Dog! You up here in the 21st century, we're all back there in the stone age, man." Brad's proud. "Third infantry to the east, us, our neighbors to the north, and the Euphrates bridge. Our objective." For at least the next thirty seconds.

Sixta comes screaming up, attacking Ray: "Jesus Chrast! What is you, some kind of goddamn hippy faggot?! Fuck is this? Damn it all. Why the fuck is your shirt out of regulation?" Ray looks down at his shirttails, untucked. Iceman jumps onto the scene. "Sergeant Major, is there a problem? My Marines have been working on that Humvee all morning." Not Sixta's problem. "I don't care if your Marine has a sucking chest wound! He will not traipse around on the deck with his shirttails hanging out! Might just NJP all your asses!" (Next to a court-martial, Non-Judicial Punishment is the worst thing that can happen: you get knocked down ranks and pay grades. Sixta is a freak.) Iceman acknowledges him, and dresses Ray down. "Corporal Person, be advised, you're expected to conduct all business in this camp in compliance with the grooming standard, under direct order from the Battalion Commander himself." Perfect. Ray tucks his shirt in, and Sixta nods greedily for a second, rolling on his heels, before immediately finding a new victim: Pappy.

"Sergeant Patrick, your mustache hairs is in violations! Growing beyond the corner of your mouth! I hear Godfather hisself say you look like a bum. Police that mustache! Yes, sir! And you look like Elvises!" And thus ended my brief romance with the US Marine Corps, because I'll be damned if I ever spend a second in the

company of this person. Ray pulls his shirttails out again, and Iceman gives him a look. "Don't push our luck." And I mean, the most cartoonish people in this story -- Captain America, Rudy Reyes, Sixta, Ray Person -- are the most true-to-life, and I had to watch this maybe a dozen times to even begin to understand what a Sergeant Major is all about, because what he is about is this: being the freak. Looking for things to yell about. It's not because he's a dick -- he's also a dick -- but because that's what he does. They kept saying his job was to be an asshole and I thought they were being cute, but no: his job is *actually to be an asshole*. That's so weird.

Ray Person is more of a freelance asshole. He brings the mail in, tossing envelopes onto racks and over laptop screens. "Walt! Trombley! Nothing but letters. No batteries, no diapers, and no turret," he says to Iceman, because every scene in this episode has to include Brad's turret issues. "Guess not today, homes. Just another five dozen letters from fuckin' schoolkids and shit. Oh my God, Listen to this. *Dear Mr. Army man...*" Trombley bristles at that. "... *I am proud that you are being brave and defending our country against the terrorists. They are bad and I am glad that you are going to catch them and punish them.*" Somebody notes, laughing, that she's a good writer. "...*I am glad that you are so brave and I pray for you.*" Somebody asks what she looks like, and Ray deadpans, "She's actually pretty hot." She looks about ten years old. Manimal is disgusting: "I like them braids..."

Ray finds another letter: "Listen to this shit right here. *Maybe you'll be able to come home without having to fight...*" They grunt and bitch as a unit. "*Peace is always much better than war and it would be nice if no one would be hurt.*" That is some fucking hippy communist shit right there. Where the fuck is this weak ass child from?" (Somebody yells out, hilariously, "Vermont!") Iceman watches from his rack. He told Evan once, at the beginning, that he would never associate with these people under normal circumstances: that's the look on his face right now. "Fredrick Firestone... Maryland." ("Fucking Maryland," somebody says for no reason.) Ray gets to speechifying.

"Dear Frederick! Thank you for your nice letter. But I am actually a U.S. Marine who was born to kill, whereas clearly you have mistaken me for some sort of wine-sipping communist dick-suck. And although peace probably appeals to tree-loving bisexuals like you and your parents, I happen to be a death-dealing, blood-crazed warrior who wakes up every day just hoping for the chance to dismember my enemies and defile their civilizations. Peace sucks a hairy asshole, Freddie. War is the motherfucking answer."

Manimal feels the moto in the air and Espera snorts. "But thanks for writing anyway. Your pal, Ray."

Encouraged, Ray continues yapping. "Man, every motherfucker in this camp is just waiting for packages of dip, ripped fuel, porn mags, batteries, hash chunks, a dirty-ass jerk-off letter from Suzie Rottencrotch. Except for Brad Colbert over here, who actually thinks that his mail-order turret is gonna come in before we step off.

Sorry, Brad. But no. All we get is this happy day fucking horseshit from Miss Cuntlips' fourth-grade class. Can you fucking believe this shit?" Everybody gathers around to look at the picture again. Lilley's impressed; I think it's Manimal who offers to "eat a mile of her shit just to see where it came from," which is troubling on many levels but not as troubling as the off-screen Marine who offers to take her diaper off. Dudes are gross.

Do you call it a mess hall? Nate passes the word about not wearing the watch caps between 0900 and 1700. Lilley alerts white trash Chaffin to the sauce on his face, and instead of politely thanking him, Chaffin uses it -- as he uses everything he can -- as a springboard to some race hatred. "Oh, yeah? I look like a mud? I look like Gabe's filthy spic brother?" Gabe grins and tosses a napkin at him. Further down the table, Espera yanks the floppy hat off Trombley's little head. "What the fuck is on your grape, Devil Dog? You see any other Recon Marine in here wearing a soft cover?" (You know what's gayer than using the word "hat" to describe a hat? Every single thing that has happened so far.) "No fucking way, Dog. I know you didn't go through BRC, but, boy, you gotta front. All these other grunts look up to Recon like we are cold-blooded warriors. We're carnivorous motherfuckers, and you gotta carry it like that." One percent of all Marines qualify for the Basic Recon Course, and half of the ones that enter don't complete it. Espera gives him ... Some other kind of hat. All the hats! "Here. I got your six, boy. He puts it on. This motherfucker." Trombley gets called FNG for the second time today, and simmers. Recon stands as one, and exits with a flourish, cracking Godfather up at the officers' table. "Cocky motherfuckers..."

[PAGE 10 MISSING]

Chaffin laughs all creepily, and Evan quietly notes that it could be worse: "I used to write for *Hustler*." Well, that stops their nonsense. Chaffin halts immediately, slapping Evan's chest, and Ray comes loping up, asking what Evan wrote for *Hustler*. "Porn reviews? Hot Letters? ...Beaver Hunt..." Beaver Hunt. What the fuck could that possibly mean? Is that the thing where it's normal gross ladies that send their pictures in? The amateur thing? That is so fucked up. I am so glad I never read *Hustler*. Ray is, of course, impressed. "This guy wrote Beaver Hunt! Oh shit, He must have those polaroids of your mom!" Iceman watches Evan carefully; Q-Tip shakes his head. They toss Evan's bags in a pile of crates; he blanches at a rat that's hanging out there. Where he'll be sleeping. Somebody says, in a creepy husky voice, "Hey Reporter, ever seen a grown man naked?"

Chaffin sees his chance. "They got you in the fucking ghetto! You feel me? Fuckin' spics and a goddamn jig..." Q-Tip, the guy in a do-rag who always says "screwby," calls Chaffin out, but he is unaffected. "Spics, a coon, *and* a fucking wigger. See, wiggers be the worst... Race traitors, miscegenatin' with the muds..." Espera comes to Evan's aid. "Hey. You don't have to listen to this little trailer-trash-Whiskey-Tango fuck," and Garza backs him up. "Ain't all your crackhead brothers nappy-headed and shit? James is the only white boy in the family. Three stepdads, and they're all

black." Espera, because it's been five seconds, decides it's time for another speech. "Take this down, Dog."

"It makes my heart heavy to see the white race sink as low as James's mother has. At least if she was Mexican she'd be ashamed of herself. But being a white bitch, she still thinks she's better than the brothers she sells that ass to in the parking lot of the titty bar she works at." Q-Tip awards this a screwby, and Chaffin, hilariously, offers up this defense: "Yo, fuck *you*, man. She's a *bookkeeper*." Espera amends this to the dubious "cockkeeper," and Chaffin -- check out these priorities -- calls to Holsey for backup. "Yo, T! You hear that? The beaners are cracking on your people too. Ain't you gonna say something?" Holsey is just about as interested in his bullshit as Iceman, and says quietly that he's just not into "that racial thing." It's just a game, like rehearsing to die. The fact that Chaffin means it, utterly and from the bottom of his heart, somehow has nothing to do with it, because that's not the important part of what's going on here.

They're all just pressure valves for everybody else's shit: things get too gay, call Rudy or Ray to be or make a gay joke; somebody rubs up against a racist issue, Chaffin's there to be so cartoonish about it that you can't even be upset. And there's Holsey saying, "I do not play this particular game, please do not invite me." Chaffin grabs Garza and takes off, inviting a discussion of what they'll all do when they get out of the Corps. "We're gonna join us a border patrol and shoot us some wetbacks." Garza laughs at him and takes aim at imaginary wetbacks, and they bounce. Problem solved. Espera welcomes Evan aboard, Evan thanks him nearly silently, and the scene closes on an offscreen science lesson: "Did you know that a wetback pussy is actually warmer than a normal average white pussy?" I cannot say that I knew that. About the wetback pussy, I mean. I was unaware.

Manimal and Rudy work on the turret for their Humvee; as usual Manimal is getting aggro and Rudy is being placating in his singsong voice: "Relax, my Manimal. Pappy will get you fixed up." (When Jon Huertas, the actor that plays Espera, was reading the script he was totally disgusted by the Rudy "character," because nobody could actually be this new-agey and weird and unique and funny... Until he actually met Rudy, whom he then referred to as a "unicorn" because there is only one of him. That's why they cast Rudy as himself in the movie: he's a unicorn.) Rudy gives Pappy his Leatherman tool and then notes Sixta, on the rampage again. "Mr. Potatohead at your six, closing fast." Ugh. "Sergeant Patrick! On the deck! You mocking me?" Pappy is sad to be dealing with Sixta right now; even worse is when Sixta grabs his face, pursing Pappy's lips and shaking his head around like a dog. "Hars hanging from your face beyond your mouth areas! You are unsightly! Unsanitary! And in violations of Godfather's written standards! You reads me, Sergeant Patrick? You has until o dark hundred to unfuck yoself!" Manimal complains about how Godfather only announced the mustache-growing contests two weeks ago, and now Sixta's halfway up Pappy's ass about it. "Well," says Pappy slowly. "We all got jobs to do. Sergeant Major Sixta's job is to be an asshole. And he excels at the position." Good for him. Now, just keep him the fuck away from me.

Brad continues looking for his turret, questioning somebody at battalion: "It's titanium. 16 lbs, about yea big? Should have been shipped weeks ago, and I was starting to wonder if it was shortstopped at Battalion somewhere..." The guy's not getting it. "A shield?" Yeah, for the main gunner. Iceman's life is about protecting his men in the field, and every scene with the turret makes it an objective correlative for that central issue. He's looking for something he will never find, which is safety for his men, and no matter where he looks for it, nobody even knows what he's talking about. Garza stands on top of a Humvee, completely exposed, shooting a gun as big as a surfboard. I've never stood on top of a Humvee while it was standing still, much less slip-sliding through desert sand while people shot at my head. Get the dude a fucking turret; they're not supposed to be in these cracked-out Humvees in the first place. Rudy approaches, looking grim and gigantic and apologetic, and summons Brad back to the tents.

[PAGE 12 MISSING]

Ray's holding a cloth to his face where it was burnt, as Walt explains how the cookstove for Rudy's espresso maker exploded. "Let me understand this," Brad says slowly. "My RTO has just been burned in his tent by an exploding portable stove. And without my RTO, I will be going to war unable to quickly and effectively establish radio communications within our unit, with other elements of the Battalion, and with close air support. Is this what is happening?" Espera adds that they'll probably all get NJP'd for using the stove in the tent in the first place. "Over an espresso maker," Iceman says, without blinking. "This platoon is going down over an espresso maker." These poor guys are going crazy! Start the war already!

Another command meeting is just ending; Godfather calls Nate back from the door of the tent. "Your CO [Encino Man] passed on your report. Your unit sustained a casualty, a Marine was burned." Nate nods and speaks in that quick, clipped way he has. "Corporal Person sustained minor injuries when a cookstove being operated according to regulations suffered a catastrophic failure." Godfather gets all Godfathery about it: "And the men operating this cookstove were outside the tent when this happened?" Because that, and not Ray's face, is the issue here. "At the time, Corporal Person was kneeling by the entrance, servicing a 148." Encino Man stares into space, completely oblivious to the entire universe. Nate lies and says that he personally witnessed the stove malfunction, "And the swift action of my Marines to treat Corporal Person." Godfather suggests that Nate write some of his men up for commendation, in that case, and Nate, nearly smiling, says he'll consider it. But the reason he doesn't smile, not even after leaving that tent, is the point of this story.

In a perfect world, blind obedience to the chain of command would be proper, in war. It would save lives. But in a perfect world, Godfather would shut up about the grooming standard and stop worrying about paperwork, Encino Man would be cleaning latrines, and Captain America would be in a mental institution. Fick is amazing, and a hero, but he got here a different way than most of them: he was a Classics major at Dartmouth who heard a speech, developed a scorching case of

idealism, and entered Officer's Training immediately. He wasn't worn down like the enlisted men, and he's not indoctrinated. The thing that the military does to you, breaking you down and building you up, happened in a very compressed length of time. He sees the forest, and the trees, and he's horrified by a lot of what goes down. The misuse of authority and the bureaucracy and the stupidity of some of the men in command. None of which, to the Marine mind, can be allowed to even exist. So Nate's discipline is different from everybody else's, even Brad's, because it involves biting his tongue: the Hollywood stance, where it's a bad war fought by good men. Only instead of a stance, it's his entire existence: Not ignoring the stuff altogether, the way the enlisted men can do, or laughing it off like Ray, but taking every day to measure the distance between his idealism and the reality, and then stowing those thoughts for later so he can concentrate on keeping his men alive, and tactically viable. I love Nathaniel Fick, you have to read his book. It is inspiring, and sad. And very lonely.

[PAGE 14-16 Missing]

Nate addresses the Company, trying to explain an ROE that barely exists, and changes all the time. In the chatter, in the radio sound, it twists and moves in realtime. In the kingdom of Things, what a thing is keeps changing. "You're being called upon to kill. We're gonna be invading a country full of civilians. But at the same time, we don't know if the people shooting at us are gonna be in uniform or looking like farmers. If we shoot civilians, we're gonna turn the populace against us and lose this war. But I don't want to lose Marines because we are not aggressive." Ray gives Evan some more dip, easily, as Nate explains the rules of the game for this round. They're curiously like no rules at all. "The ROE boil down to this: If in your mind you fire to protect yourself or your team, it's the right thing." Under the cheering of the Company, Espera maintains that he doesn't want to shoot random farmers; others don't have this issue. Ray speaks up: "Sir, you got any word from the rest of the world? Is the UN going in with us, or are we on our own?" Nate starts to talk about the French, their all-too-rational, practically communist, viewpoint, stall and surrender, when the shouting starts.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! -- An ecstasy of fumbling, fitting the clumsy helmets just in time. And Evan yelling out and stumbling, floundering like a man in fire, or lime. The orders are dim, through the masks; looks like he's drowning. He grabs at his nutsack, crunched by the MOPP suit's straps, and eventually falls on his ass while a Sergeant watches, bemused. When they give the all clear, three Marines mass around Evan, staring down at him as he wriggles and moans. "Can you help me with the..." he gestures to his crotch and then squeezes a fist, illustratively. They lean back in sympathy, and then one snips the strap while Evan whimpers. "I forgot to spit out my tobacco ... So I had to swallow it. And this suit is too small... That strap was crushing my nuts..." Christopher, I think, grins down at him. "Reporter, you are possibly the biggest fuckup I have encountered." Iceman says he'll fit right in, then.

Evan watches Rudy intently as he puts together a gun while wearing an intense camo suit with multicolored shit all over it. He is so awesomely weird! Ray notices

Evan staring at Rudy, and grins wildly. "You know, it doesn't make you gay if you think Rudy's hot. We all think he's hot. Jesus, you're beautiful." Rudy smiles back sunnily and shakes his head. "Actually I'm going to hell out here. Back home, all I eat is sushi and vegetables. The nutrition here is garbage. You know, I think Sheree and I are going to move to San Francisco. There's no fat people there." Wynn sighs. "That was a no-shit scud attack, Gents." Garza's overjoyed: "Awesome! I just lived through a scud attack!" Manimal asks Rudy why he should care if there's fat people in San Francisco, and Rudy says he just wants to live where people care about themselves. Iceman finally exhales loudly, like a burst balloon. "Jesus Christ, Rudy. When are you gonna realize that you're fucking gay?" Rudy laughs -- "gay!" -- like the thought never occurred to him. "When we're on libo, you wear Banana Republic Daisy Duke shorts, now you're rolling into battle in your goddamn chicken suit and J-Lo glasses. You dress like a pimp queen." I don't even know what that is. Rudy does, though, and says he is no goddamn pimp queen: "I wear clothes that are body-conscious," he says, and they laugh. And then the shouts again: Gas gas gas! Move move move! Evan pulls his suit together in record time, and Ray congratulates him. "I did it!" Evan says self-deprecatingly, fuzzy through the suit. He's still on vacation.

[Page 18 Missing]

Night invasion. Ray drives the lead Humvee, watching bombs and mortars through his NVGs. It looks totally crazy, like a tiny Anderson Cooper should be in the corner of the screen to reassure you that it's not really real. They're five klicks, at this moment, from breach point two. "Man, I wish I had some 'shrooms. This is the fucking shit!" Ray's giddy; Iceman's annoyed. "Yeah, it's the shiznit. Watch the fucking road." Trombley asks, again, why they're not there yet, but the Ripped Fuel coursing through Ray's veins doesn't know this is rhetorical. "Maybe 'cause a certain severely retarded company commander by the name of Encino Man who, in his infinite retardation, duct-taped his Humvee windows. Thought he was being all tactical and shit, until Bravo missed the turn at the checkpoint 'cause retard couldn't see out his fuckin' truck." Brad says his name, low and warningly, but he's off: "Oh! There's layers of retardation that most people don't even know about. You should quote me on that," he says to Evan, over his shoulder.

"Look at this shit," Ray continues as they drive. "How come we can't ever invade a cool country... like chicks in bikinis, you know? How come countries like that don't ever need Marines? I'll tell you why. It's lack of pussy that fucks countries up. Lack of pussy is the root fucking cause of all global instability. If more hajjis were getting quality pussy, there'd be no reason for us to come over here and fuck them up like this. 'cause a nut-busted hajji is a happy hajji." There's a kind of feminist undertone, really.

-- Ray! Ray. How much Ripped Fuel have you ingested?" Ray leans over, totally charming for a second, and speaks to the air in front of Brad's face: "I'm on it like a *motherfucker*, Brad. I'm moto, dude!" Iceman tells him to lay off, because it takes away his -- already nearly nonexistent -- ability to shut up. Ray's sad for a moment.

They drive. "Interesting theory though," says Evan after a time. Ray nods, and he's off again. "Yeah, you should quote me on it. You know what, you should definitely quote me on it. This whole fucking thing, it comes down to pussy. Look, if you took the Republican Guard and comped their asses in Vegas for a weekend, no fucking war." I don't entirely disagree. Evan's like, "So it's not about oil, or WMD's, or Saddam...?"

"No. In the opinion of this Marine it's about pussy. Saddam's just part of the problem. If Saddam invested more in the pussy infrastructure of Iraq than he did on his fucking gayass army, than this country would be no more fucked up than, say, Mexico..." Brad finally puts his foot down, even though it's getting good. "RAY. Please shut up. Thank you." They're one klik from the breach point; Ray watches the war through his glasses, driving toward it, full of crazy. "Wake up," Iceman says softly to Trombley. "You're missing the invasion."

[PAGE 20 Missing]

Captain America is once again cutting loose with his craziness on the comms; Ray hands the handset to Evan with eyes rolling. "We've been static way too long, sitting here with our asses hanging out. We don't stand a chance against one T-72 tank. They got 70 of them out here. This is suicide!" Iceman clears his throat: "Sir, the behavior of your fellow officer, commander of our sister platoon, is starting to concern us." Christopher refers to him as Captain America, calling him unprofessional, and Nate tells them he doesn't want to know their nicknames for the officers. "Is everyone on your teams getting some shut-eye?" Paddy says his team hasn't slept since the pizza at Mathilda, which was about thirty hours ago. Ray pisses about twenty yards away, singing "Sk8er Boi" into the wind. It gets louder and louder as Nate tells them to rotate their guys and get them sleeping; Christopher is unimpressed but Fick thinks it's cute: "We are in love, haven't you heard now we rock each other's world..."

Later, punchy, Brad and Ray are singing "Loving You" in ridiculous falsettos, changing the words around *South Park* style. Evan giggles. Ray drives, reminiscing. "When my band opened up for Limp Bizkit in Kansas City, we fuckin' sucked. But then again, so did they. The only difference is that they became famous... and I became a Marine." Way to come out a winner, Ray! For real. Garza sees some kids walking, a boy and a girl holding hands. "Aw, cute," Brad says. "Don't shoot 'em, Garza." Up above them, Garza laughs, and in the cab Brad fights with the map for a moment before Ray, without even thinking, hands him a cap of dip for a paperweight. They're a team. It's neat. Garza calls out hardball, paved road, coming up, which Brad identifies as Main Supply Route "Tampa." That just means it's a road, with a name Americans can pronounce. "When we've crossed it, we'll be the northernmost unit in Iraq. Hitman Two, this is Two One. Do you want my victor to provide overwatch on the northeast corner of the MSR?" Roger. They stop.

Later, two white pickups approach the watch point, and everybody pulls out their guns. Nate calls it in to Hitman: "I got two pickups bearing down on us fast." There are men in them with AKs; no answer comes back immediately. "Hitman, I am seeing

armed Iraqis in civilian clothes in white pickups marked with red diamonds." Finally, Encino Man comes back. "Can you... Can you wave them off?" Um... "Hitman, this is Two. These are *armed Iraqis in marked victors with weapons pointed at us*. Over." Encino Man is only a simple caveman. "ROE states uniformed soldiers only... Um, and they should be firing at us." Nate asks if he can at least snatch one of them and find out who they are. The answer to this question would only scare you right now. Encino Man denies him, and repeats the order. Nate is sad, and hangs up and waves the men off. All the men bitch and moan. "Our first contact with armed Iraqis," Brad grunts, "And we wave at 'em like bitches." Ray is heartbroken. "You know what happens when you get out of the Marine Corps? You get your brains back." Brad can't even bring himself to bark about it.

Godfather's listening to the cricket scores on BBC when Sixta summons him to meet the Company commanders. The first thing he does is tell them to drop their pots, because either his head has begun to stink or there's something wrong with the helmets. "We're fourteen hours since crossing the LOD. We've moved seventy klicks north. We, gentlemen, are the northernmost unit in Iraq. Our job now is to screen the northern flank of 1-MEF." Patterson asks if there's any mission news. "We still doing the bridge assault?" Um, no. "No word. But judging by where they've placed us, higher-ups have deemed that mission irrelevant. Even so, what's foremost in Godfather's mind? We're still very much in the game, gentlemen, very much in the game. Okay, that's all for now." They head out, and Evan stops Godfather. "Colonel Ferrando, if I can ask, why does your...voice sound that way?" Throat cancer. Evan assumes he was a smoker, but he just looks him in the eye. "Nah. Just lucky, I guess."

Brad's dug in on a hilltop, watching the horizon through his scope; Trombley's a bit lower on the grade, tossing foot out into the night. Why? "I'm gonna shoot me a dog." Brad gets all Iceman on him. "No you're not, Trombley. No one's shooting any dogs in Iraq." Trombley rolls over and looks through his scope, sighing heavily. "Got seven. You got seven?" Trombley confirms and they watch the men walking closer. Doc Bryan runs up, asking if they're getting this. Brad says they've already counted sixty on foot. "See how they're walking all jacked-up? Sore-footed." Iceman despairs that they will never get to shoot anybody.

Next day, they march the surrenders to a makeshift camp and go through their stuff: emptying pockets and canteens, taking papers. Espera pours the water out of one guy's canteen -- at the bottom is a knife. "Brad. Prison rules, Dog. Just like LA." Nate's with another small group, listening to Meesh translate. "They are just civilians fleeing Basra... They are grateful to be liberated by the Americans..." Iceman points out one man's belt buckle, and Espera recognizes it as military issue. They cut open a pouch on the belt: the guy is Republican Guard. Garza comes running up with MRE items he got off some of them, and then a big group of them start yelling and holding out these little cards. Nate recognizes them as part of "the shit psy-ops dropped on Iraqi Forces, promising safe passage to any who surrender to the Americans." Meesh translates worse stuff yet: "He says 30 km east of here on a bridge by the canal, there are Iraqi military death squads that are executing Iraqi

soldiers who flee. The death squad dudes are in white SUVs with red diamonds on them." Nate and Brad look at each other. Fucking Encino Man. "They are Fedayeen. They are loyal to Saddam."

[PAGE 23 MISSING]

Bryan grumbles; Espera's grossed out too. "The Iraqis' first contact with Americans, we fuck 'em..." Less troubled is the disgusting and annoying translator Meesh, who shakes the men down one by one for their cigarettes. He plops one's shades on his own head as Evan watches.

Brad watches the men, tired, unsteady on their ripped-up feet, heading back the way they came.

"Turn it over, Ray. We're Oscar Mike."

Ray starts the Humvee, Garza sits atop it, and they head out. The Company drives across train tracks, heading northwest, away from Basra; the surrenders walk down it, into death. It's a hot day, bright. A total of 200 men took the coward's way out, and surrendered. They got letters from the sky, like manna, promising life and safe passage, and the men fled into the arms of America. The dream they were following got sour and bitter, and they decided that, as long as the US was going crazy anyway, they might as well believe in it: that Captain America story, that idea that America was there to help them, to save them. That's what psy-ops does best, and that was the point of the safe passage offer: not to save lives, or to help people, but to attack Saddam's army where it counts, and take it apart before the fighting could begin. It worked, and they split, and they walked into the sun, toward America. And when they got there, First Recon turned them right back around, and sent them to the one place they couldn't ever go again. They sent them into death, and headed northwest, toward deaths of their own. How's it feel to be fucking dead? It feels sad. And very alone.